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Does promotion have the magic touch?

Matching the 4 P's with the 4 R's of place branding

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Introduction

Promotion is one of the most vital aspects in place marketing (Gold & Ward, 1994, Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993) and plays a key role in place branding (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010; Dinnie, 2009; Gertner, 2011; Warnaby & Medway, 2013) also in place, e.g. destination, city or country branding because it has a broader range and reach due to the complexity regarding their multidimensional feature, the government role/interest, the interdisciplinary roots and the various stakeholders (Dinnie, 2009; Gertner, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2005; Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009; Rainisto, 2003; Szondi, 2007). Some authors have mainly been interested in questions concerning issues beyond country branding and marketing, for instance, foreign affairs, public diplomacy, globalization, sustainability (Anholt, 2007; Aronczyk, 2003; Fetscherin, 2010; Olins, 2011) which can be applicable to any place with governmental authorities involved.

The key point about the 'magical' touch of promotion can be because "the image communicated in place marketing/branding activities will most likely be one where only the positive is explicitly accentuated" (Warnaby & Medway, 2013, p.347). This is likely because place branding in a relationship management context also means "to change negative or false stereotypes or reinforce some positive stereotypes associated with the country and its people" (Szondi, 2007, p.10). From this perspective ambiguous aspects, for instance, persuasion and subliminal artifices ('tricks') or 'dreamlike' strategies and 'supernatural' campaigns for natural beauty places – regions, city or countries can - be taken the wrong way or treated as suspicious. This indicates a need to understand the various insights of how promotion could have a negative effect or even be an undesirable strategy in order to brand a place. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory research is to reflect on the role of 'magical' promotion in place marketing moving forward to place branding strategies and related challenges.

Articles reporting place branding and place marketing have increased in the past two decades (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010), however there is a "scarcity of empirical research" (Gertner, 2011, p.100). This indicates a need to understand the promotion opportunities that exist among place branding strategies and reflect about potential channels and messages.

Hence, the literature review is presented in four sections. Firstly, this paper starts with a theoretical place marketing overview and the plethora of marketing and communications promotions possibilities; secondly, this paper reviews publications in business about the 'magic' aspect and its definitions as well. Then, an example of a national park in Brazil is examined to explore the tactics used by two online travel companies and based on the place marketing and place branding theories. This case involves the promotion of Lençóis Maranhenses as a Brazilian national park and tourism destination that is analysed using two online travel companies' homepages and the related content as documentary secondary data. Finally, the Discussion gives a brief summary of the literature review and the critique of the inappropriate promotion of this chosen place as well, suggesting a guideline from the exploring of the two theories – the 4R's of Place Branding and the P of Promotion from the 4P's of the Marketing Mix. Additionally, this part includes a discussion of future research which is identified as potentially providing the 'magical touch' of promotion in place marketing. Kavaratzis (2012) believes that the place brand communications through media and messages can express and highlight the place's identity, once they have the capability for influencing the public – almost, as he says, in a magical way (2012, p.11).

Literature Review

Place Marketing Overview

Originally, Kotler & Levy (1969) have first mentioned about marketing a place in their book 'The Broadened Concept of Marketing', based on diverse purposes to some alterations in strategies and the practice implementation, which directed the way to a broader concept and more integrated theories. More than two decades later, the field has started to become wider and richer due to new researchers' studies. For instance, the pioneer authors as Kotler et al. (1993) and Gold & Ward (1994) have applied the concept of marketing - specifically - to places similarly to the products, services and companies, mostly focused on marketing strategies in order to promote a place, in this case, a national park. Over the years, there has been a growing recognition that a place brand incorporates additional and more complex features than a product because of its multidimensional meaning and multiple stakeholder engagement (Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2009; Jansen, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2005; Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009; Rainisto, 2003). Moreover, others have highlighted the relevance of the place as destination in the tourism industry (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2010), which can apply place branding strategies with different context and purpose. Furthermore, Rainisto (2004) was one of the first researchers about place marketing studies focusing on integrated place branding strategies. Rainisto (2004, p.1) also reinforces that "Strategic marketing can be applied to places, and the tools of corporate marketing can be transferred to place marketing. Places can also be branded, through creating and communicating a place identity, which increases a place's attraction". Further, in his major research, Rainisto (2004, p.34) states, "In place marketing, the place product must be adapted to fit the needs of place customers. The overall targets of a place can be reached only when this task has been fulfilled. Each place should define and communicate its special features and competitive advantages effectively."

Specifically, Mitchell, Wooliscroft & Higham (2013, p.695) believes that particularly in terms of private and public service partnerships, in order to focus in sustainability for national park management, using a model supports "the public service strategy management particularly in terms of balancing environmental, social and economic strategy, defining public service marketing parameters and ensuring the integration of short-term and long-term strategy".

Later on, Moilanen & Rainisto (2009) rely on the view that the foundation of place marketing/branding comes from place selling and from business management. Kavaratzis (2005) also believes that the application of marketing efforts was initially developed from the place promotion, then to place marketing and consequently, to place branding based on two distinct trends: from the place marketing theory and from the practice of city administrator's origins. Both Anholt (2007) and Fetscherin (2010) consider public diplomacy and public affairs arenas associated to place branding initiatives, being against the application of only marketing practices.

Promoting a place - through place marketing and place branding - consists of using strategic marketing to brand the place's image. The field of study has its roots in several disciplines (Gertner, 2011) from diverse authors. Fundamentally, scholars believe place branding's themes are closely interrelated with place branding or marketing strategies (Dinnie, 2009; Jansen, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2005; Kotler & Gertner, 2004; Kotler et al., 1993; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Warnaby & Medway, 2013; Zakarevičius & Lonikaitė, 2013;) - supported by communications activities and marketing efforts in order to advance the place branding strategies in the target market (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010; Jansen, 2008;

Kavaratziz, 2005; Kotler & Gertner, 2004; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Moilanen & Rainisto; 2009; Rainisto, 2004; Szondi 2007).

Gold & Ward (1994, quoted in Aronczyk, 2103) have worked with place promotions, using publicity and marketing activities. Likewise, the development of a place brand, for instance, can be performed by several means (medias or channels), with the most obvious being advertisement, direct marketing, personal sales, websites and catalogues, but also with public relations, media companies and national tourism agencies with journalists, event planners and movie directors for destination branding, for instance (Morgan et al., 2010, p.59).

‘Magical’ Promotion in Place Marketing?

Based on the previous section, the plethora of possible communications and marketing strategies are perceptibly performed into a place, for instance, a national park, whose brand can be planned, targeted, and implemented to its stakeholders. By drawing on the concept of ‘magic’ in business, three examples below are able to show that the ‘magic’ aspect could be aligned to a novel theoretical field, e.g., place branding. In general, subliminal artifices (‘tricks’) can happen and the “distrust of advertising and promotion campaigns, and usually built on negative personal experiences” (Heath & Heath, 2008, p.1035) This opportunity is suggested by Gertner (2011, p.101) when concluding in his massive review of publications (two decades), highlights, “the field must also make an effort to identify variables that might play a role in the attitudes toward city brand, nation brand and so on”.

The first one is about technology, by Kiel (1984), which shows how ‘magic’ in business could be identified with the blend of technology and marketing, relating this link to a magic mix, for him “Market pull and technology push are not opposing or mutually exclusive paths to innovation. Understanding the technology-marketing interface and integrating it with corporate strategy and organizational design is the way to maintain a productive balance between these two.

Actually, in a way, the second example partially discusses the use of ‘magic’ in a ‘music city’ from a tourism and place-marketing perspective – Liverpool, in England. Roberts’ recent study (2014, p.10), “explores links between cultural heritage, consumption and place by examining the extent to which the ‘rubbing off’ of musical cultural capital can be said to have informed the development of a political economy of contagious magic”. When exploring this topic, Roberts has stated “that *magic* is a potent and critically under theorised force”; being “it is necessary to point out that the rationale for focusing on magic has developed less from a deep-seated curiosity as to the qualities and ontological characteristics of magic *per se* in relation to music and place” (2014, p.11);

Lastly, the third example is about decision-driven marketing from Harvard Business Review by Joshi and Giménez (2014), which brings Target example, relating it to creativity, that “the company’s marketing organization had a rich history of making ‘magic’ - its processes were highly creative but also highly subjective” (p.68).

Matching Promotion from the Marketing Mix with the 4 R’s of Place Branding

Well-known in the field over 70 years, enhanced by subsequent researchers while partially criticized during the field advances, environmental changes, and trends (Constantinides, 2010) - the 4 P’s Marketing Mix model by McCarthy (1964) was selected for this paper. However, the 4 P’s was and can still be respected as a professional toolkit and an archetype for marketing planning for operational strategic focus in spite of criticisms. Nevertheless, this paper will consider Promotion out of the three P’s – Product, Price, and Place. Promotion as a communication channels with ethical messages, creative foundation, and appropriate efforts - as set of strategic activities for endorsing the brand, reinforcing the products/services and

empowering the stakeholders' choice – being certainly stated as integrated marketing communications (Fill, 2009; Fitzgerald & Arnott, 2000; Kotler and Keller, 2006; Myers, 1999; Shimp, 2010) – including advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, and personal selling. This is supported by Kavaratzis (2012) who argues for the necessity of including stakeholders' participation in place branding.

Whereas in place branding, Aitken & Campelo (2011, p.925) incorporates four R's of their theory, considering "the primary determinant of a place brand: Rights, Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships". This model discuss the sense of place in order "to understand the ethos of place in terms of communal governance" (Aitken & Campelo, 2011, p.922). The Rights represent the enactment of the place's context, under arched by the Roles of the people which have recognition of their Responsibilities within the network of the Relationships inside the community. Their findings indicate that "the integrative nature of co-creation and the inclusive experience of community will lead to authenticity (brand essence), commitment from stakeholders, and brand sustainability in the context of place branding" (2011, p.927). In this paper, the brand essence is the key-concept in order to link the two theories. For Aitken & Campelo (2011, p.927), the resultant brand essence is "dynamic, authentic and most important, collective". Moreover, the authors points out that for developing a brand strategy established by a co-created experience empowers the community in order to implement "brand positioning, representation, brand governance, and brand ownership" (Aitken & Campelo, 2011, p.927).

Data Collection and Analysis

Regarding the method design, one of the ways of conducting the exploratory research is throughout a search in the literature (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009), which "is a valuable means of finding out what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light" (Robson, 2002, p.59, quoted in Saunders, 2009, p.139). Using qualitative approach for a case study also documentary secondary data and observation primary data was collected for this paper as recommended by Saunders et al. (2009, p.259).

The documentary secondary data is from two sources; from two internationally well-recognized online travel companies' websites (the main text and written material) and from the Brazilian Government National Park's website (Bureau of Tourism, 2015b). This documentary data was available and was purposely chosen in order to provide contextual data (Saunders et al., 2009, p.269) for the tourist destination - Lencois Maranhenses National Park, which is an adventurous destination in the Northeast of Brazil in Sao Luis do Maranhao State since 1991 (Bureau of Tourism, 2015a). According to the Agencia Brasil (2013), there is a population of 5,500 thousand native people living there for more than 200 years, this local population, who survive from agriculture and livestock, are poor and illiterate - they have no access to public policies by the Government (Agencia Brasil, 2013).

In fact, the national park is 242 kilometres from the state capital, Sao Luis, and 2 kilometres from the city of Barreirinhas, where is the per night stopover, by the Preguicas River (Bureau of Tourism, 2015a). To get to the national park, the visitors cross this river by boat followed by a sandy road trip in a 4X4 traction truck or by a small plane. Lencois Maranhenses National Park is classified as one of the sixty-five inductor tourist destinations of the Brazilian Government Bureau of Tourism with the total size of 598 square miles (Bureau of Tourism, 2015b).

Next, two photos can demonstrate this Brazilian natural scenery:

Illustrations 1 and 2. Lencois Maranhenses National Park



Source: Bureau of Tourism (2015a)

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of research because of the peculiarities of ‘magic’ *per se* – as being a theoretical critical topic and an under theorised construct in academia.

From the Oxford Dictionary (2014), ‘magic’ (as a noun) can be defined as following (i) “the power of apparently influencing events by using mysterious or supernatural forces”; (ii) “a quality of being beautiful and delightful in a way that seems remote from daily life”; (iii) “mysterious tricks”. The dictionary highlights ‘talent’ or ‘exceptional skill’ as synonyms, in an informal way. Precisely, this example was chosen due to this ‘magical’ impression where the paradise lagoons are surrounded by sand as natural swimming pools are promoted and advertised with two essential components of the communication missing. Firstly, the need of an accredited tour guide due to the size and density of this unique park because the park has 155 thousand hectares, 70 meters of beaches and 40 meters high sand dunes - which can be dangerous, such as drowning (O Imparcial, 2015) and car accidents on the sandy roads (LD Turismo, 2013). Secondly, the need to be aware of and have knowledge about the ideal season and time to visit when, for example, there is water in the lagoons - because most of the lagoons disappear in the dry season. Also it is important to know the best time to visit which is between June and September.

Similarly, the adverts found in two recognized online travel websites – Expedia and Booking.com - are not clear about these relevant facts about the touristic destination.

As top reasons to visit the park, Booking.com (2015) promotes on its homepage, “Nature, adventure and tranquillity” among others attributes. Moreover, there are several travellers’ experiences posted around the promotional texts.

Expedia (2015) is more careful when it endorses the destination, “But before you go make sure to check out the Expedia travel guide on Lencois Maranhenses National Park first, so you can find out everything you need to know before you go away”. However, Expedia (2015) carefully mentions, “Expedia can provide you with our knowledge as well as great deals”.

Overall, Lencois Maranhenses National Park’s promotion definitely lacks understanding of theory and does not follow the current research when both online travel companies are not aware of the brand essence nor the stakeholders’ involvement in place branding strategies (Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2009; Jansen, 2008; Kavaratziz, 2005; Kavaratziz, 2012; Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009; Rainisto, 2003).

Final Considerations

Taken together, these findings suggest that the 4R’s of place branding are extremely relevant when promoting a place. Certainly, a charming and adventurous location is an enticing visit for foreign tourists when looking for a destination online, such as Expedia and Booking.com.

Specifically, for this paper the case of the Lencois Maranhenses National Park has demonstrated that the promotion techniques used by two travel companies’ websites was not aligned to the 4 R’s of place branding, which considers Rights, Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships as the four primary determinants of a place brand. In addition, the absence of the brand essence arguably generates the ambiguity of the promotion of the place itself.

Clearly, there is no involvement with the local community, which lives in a precarious situation and is not engaged with the place development in order to find opportunities through their rights for improving their roles and responsibilities. “It is actually stakeholders that make decisions on the place brand, attribute meaning to the place” (Kavaratzis, 2012, p.15).

Specifically, in order to consider the aspect of ‘magic’ as a successful promotion for place marketing strategies, both the theories were aligned in order to illustrate directions as a suggested guideline for future insights (Table 1).

Table 1. Promotion associated with the 4 R’s of Place Branding

Promotion	Rights	Roles	Responsibilities	Relationships
Creation awareness	To be updated about the context of the place by evidences in promoting the place with originality and appropriateness.	To promote the place in a proper and ethical way based on the communities’ needs and co-creation as well.	To be authentic to the brand essence (identity) in order to create strategies and tools for promoting the place brand image.	To be engaged to multiple stakeholders applying respective touch points in promoting the place through different channels.

In summary, the table 1 provides an overview of the possibilities of matching the promotion (as marketing and communications strategy) with the 4 R’s of Place Branding. This linkage can categorically be misled and misconstrued if not based in research and with consideration of ethical issues as well. Although, these guidelines are consistent with some published studies in place branding (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010; Jansen, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2005; Kotler & Gertner, 2004; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Rainisto, 2004; Szondi 2007) – mostly when corresponding the appropriate marketing and communications possibilities (Fill, 2009; Fitzgerald & Arnott, 2000; Kotler and Keller, 2006; Shimp, 2010) also private and public partnerships for national parks (Mitchell et al., 2013).

As a contribution this paper provides an opportunity to advance the understanding of promotion as a potential communication and marketing force to move forward in the place branding literature, as well as awareness of the miscreation and inappropriate promotion of particular places – regions, cities or countries. A reasonable approach to tackle this issue could be to intensify empirical research as suggested by Gertner (2011) into specific media channels as endorsed by Kavaratzis (2012), Morgan et al. (2010) and Szondi (2009) - advertisement, direct marketing, personal sales, websites and catalogues, but also with public relations, media companies and national tourism agencies with journalists, event planners and movie directors. Finally, more research is needed to improve understanding of these complex links and inevitably these views will be continuously exposed to debate. This would be a fruitful area for further work, for instance, exploring the involvement of co-creation with the local community for opportunities for typical arts and craft shops; building media relations for promoting beautiful places and developing positive testimonials from tourists; also focusing on the brand sustainability through the city council; and engaging with reputable and receptive travel agencies.

As a final point, these theoretical links provide adequate reasoning for the debate in favour of the stakeholder’s involvement and the brand essence in place branding strategies when endorsing a place using proper and ethical promotion strategies. Accordingly, if we are to see place branding employed with a suitable ‘magical touch’ then it is necessary to apply the rights, roles, responsibilities, and relationships of the 4R’s of place branding and surround them with stakeholder participation as the main undertaking and the priority mission of place branding/place marketing efforts.

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